

**Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control
Statement to Conference on Disarmament, February 2022**

E ngā mana, e ngā reo

Tēnā koutou katoa

I first recorded a sombre but hopeful statement for this meeting two weeks ago. But Russia's aggression has necessitated a new message, one that wholeheartedly rejects its attempts to drag us all away from civility and closer to the abyss.

New Zealand condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia's illegal invasion and occupation of Ukraine. This reckless and cynical breach of the UN Charter has already cost too many lives, and could see many more lost as conflict continues. I repeat the calls of my Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and many other international leaders, for Russia to immediately cease military operations in Ukraine, to permanently withdraw its troops, and end the pointless loss of innocent life.

New Zealand is deeply disturbed by President Putin's thinly veiled threats of nuclear retaliation against those that would seek to stand in Russia's way, our concern intensified by his subsequent move to place Russia's nuclear deterrence on high alert. This irresponsible and destabilising act increases the risk of miscalculation with catastrophic consequences for humanity – consequences that would cross borders and generations.

And this from a President who, just two months ago, joined the leaders of the other NPT nuclear weapon states to reiterate that "a nuclear war cannot be won, and must never be fought".

We urge Russia to cease its dangerous nuclear rhetoric, and to return to a diplomatic path with urgency. Nuclear weapons must never be used again, under any circumstances.

In the short space of one week, Russia has put at risk decades of diplomacy on nuclear non-proliferation. It has hollowed out negative security assurances and incentivised the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

All States must abide by their international obligations. They must comply with international humanitarian law, at all times. No state is above the law.

I am deeply concerned at reports of cluster munitions use by Russia in the current conflict. As a strong supporter of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, New Zealand condemns any use of these inhumane weapons and urges all parties to the conflict not to use them.

The protection of Ukraine's civilian population must be the highest priority. The use of explosive weapons in Ukraine's cities and towns must be avoided at all costs.

I had wished to focus my remarks today on the importance of achieving a positive outcome on nuclear disarmament at the tenth NPT Review Conference. Doing so will require concrete steps to be taken by the nuclear weapon States in fulfilment of their Article VI obligations, and their unequivocal undertaking to achieve the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

Recent events have made all too clear the horrifying consequences that could await us if this is, once again, kicked down the road. And so I urge all countries, and the nuclear weapon States in particular, to come to the Review Conference committed to achieving progress. The time for concrete action – and action that goes well beyond the joint P5 statement issued in January – is now.

I wanted to take this opportunity to set out New Zealand's views on the nuclear weapon states' statement more broadly, building on our response as a member of both the New Agenda Coalition and the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament.

We recognise that the ground has shifted since that statement was issued in early January – and certainly since Russia pledged to “seek bilateral and multilateral diplomatic approaches to avoid military confrontations, strengthen stability and predictability, increase mutual understanding and confidence, and prevent an arms race that would benefit none and endanger all”. It is clear that the impact of Russia's aggression will be felt far and wide, and that there will be consequences for the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime that are not yet known.

But for all that is uncertain, and however difficult the coming months might be, it is imperative that we remain steadfast in our commitment to full implementation of the NPT and to the pursuit of a world without nuclear weapons. Russia's aggressive actions and its escalatory and destabilising threats must not have the effect of shifting the goalposts even further away.

If anything, current events demonstrate the importance of achieving outstanding obligations and commitments, even if doing so has become even more challenging. We therefore regret that the nuclear weapon states' statement did not include a clear recognition of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, and of the security interests and concerns of non-nuclear weapons states. And we are particularly concerned that there was no reference to the five countries' unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, as agreed in 2000.

This fundamental commitment has played an important role in providing some high-level political reassurance that – despite stalled nuclear reductions, ongoing nuclear modernisation programmes and massive investment in long-term nuclear weapons capability – the nuclear weapon states nevertheless share our objective of a world without nuclear weapons and are committed to accomplishing it. For more than 20 years the unequivocal undertaking has helped sustain belief in

the NPT community's collective commitment to the grand bargain at the heart of the Treaty. It is an essential component of a credible outcome from the forthcoming NPT Review Conference.

New Zealand is a strong supporter of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which is a clear statement of our categorical rejection of these inhumane weapons. In the Pacific, the TPNW has strong support, borne out of our region's experience of nuclear testing by outside powers—the effects of which are still evident today. We encourage all states to join us at the TPNW's First Meeting of States Parties later this year, as members, signatories or observers.

New Zealand is supporting negotiations on a political declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, an important measure to strengthen the protection of civilians in conflict, as I referred to earlier. So, too, are we dedicated to addressing the challenges posed by autonomous weapons systems – challenges that we believe require urgent multilateral action through prohibition and regulation. We are committed to preserving the peaceful and sustainable use of outer space.

We are concerned by the ongoing risk of nuclear proliferation in Iran, and encourage a positive conclusion to the resumed negotiations on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. We condemn the nuclear and missile programmes of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, conducted in violation of UN Security Council resolutions.

Madam President,

I wish to end with a call to action for this body.

A crisis like the one before us demands an effective response. New Zealand does not dispute the value of *korero* - discussion and debate - in bringing states and peoples together. But we need more than talk.

It is well past time for the Conference on Disarmament to fulfil its negotiating mandate and for us all to demonstrate political will and flexibility to bring us back to the negotiating table.